

## ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, November 2, 2018***

### **\* *The Boston Globe***

#### **Red Sox bring victory celebration to Celtics game**

Nicole Yang

The World Series champions' celebratory tour stopped at TD Garden Thursday night, where members of Red Sox management and several players were on hand to watch the Celtics take on the Milwaukee Bucks.

After a timeout midway through the first quarter, the center-court video board started playing a montage of clips from the Sox' five-game series against the Dodgers. Set to the tune of the team's new World Series anthem — a remix of rapper Drake's "Nonstop" — the video opened with WEEI radio announcer Joe Castiglione's call of the final out of the deciding Game 5 and featured highlights that included Steve Pearce's two home runs in Game 5 en route to winning Series MVP.

Manager Alex Cora, cradling the Commissioner's Trophy, was first to walk onto the parquet floor. He was joined by a procession of owner John Henry and his wife, Linda Pizzuti Henry, team chairman Tom Werner, team president and CEO Sam Kennedy, assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett, first base coach Tom Goodwin, and 13 players wearing their red uniform jerseys.

The trophy eventually made its way to the hands of pitcher David Price — who announced Wednesday he was opting into his contract — which prompted the crowd to erupt in cheers. The roaring applause continued as the trophy was passed to pitcher Chris Sale and outfielder Andrew Benintendi.

Other players on the court included pitchers Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Brian Johnson, Drew Pomeranz, and Bobby Poyner; third baseman Eduardo Nunez; catchers Blake Swihart and Christian Vazquez; shortstop Xander Bogaerts, and designated hitter J.D. Martinez.

Before exiting the court, Cora made an effort to shake hands with coach Brad Stevens and Celtics forward Al Horford. Cora and Stevens had met during spring training in Fort Myers, Fla., in February, and both have been complimentary of each other's coaching abilities.

"He did a great job," Stevens said earlier this week. "You could tell he had a special way about him. It takes a lot for everyone to sacrifice a little bit more for the team, but that environment was something special."

As the executives, coaches, and players made their way back to their seats, a "Let's go Red Sox!" chant broke out.

The crowd, however, quickly pivoted to "Yankees suck!"

#### **The Red Sox' offseason is underway, but there's plenty to talk about**

Peter Abraham

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Thursday that Red Sox ace Chris Sale would be 100 percent by spring training without the need of any surgery on his left shoulder.

"We think everything that will take care of it is just rest," Dombrowski said. "So that's really where we are. We don't anticipate anything from a surgical procedure whatsoever."

Sale made one start from July 28 to Sept. 10 because of shoulder inflammation that twice landed him on the disabled list. Sale then pitched only 25⅓ innings over his remaining seven starts counting the postseason.

Manager Alex Cora plans to be exceedingly cautious with Sale, David Price, and Rick Porcello in spring training given the 14 extra games the Sox played and how aggressively the Sox used their starters in relief during the postseason.

“Joking with Chris [Wednesday], I said, ‘Your first spring training start might be March 20.’ We’ll talk about it,” Cora said. “We’ll take care of them. We have to do it.”

Dombrowski said there was “nothing scheduled” in terms of offseason surgeries for other players. But he does need to get more information on the status of second baseman Dustin Pedroia, who played only three games after offseason knee surgery.

Pedroia had a second procedure in July and believes he will be ready for spring training.

“We need to find out exactly what Pedroia’s situation is,” Dombrowski said. “That’s something that will be a focus for us now . . . I know he’s hopeful; we’re hopeful.”

The Sox have Brock Holt, Eduardo Nunez, and Tzu-Wei Lin as second basemen. Dombrowski also mentioned Michael Chavis as a possibility.

For Cora, who is close with Pedroia, the World Series championship was missing something with him on the disabled list.

“To win it without him was tough enough,” Cora said. “But like I told him, ‘You’re going to impact this team regardless.’ What he did in the clubhouse was amazing.

“We’ll see how it goes. I still expect him to contribute.”

Cora told Pedroia that if he were able, he would bat leadoff on Opening Day in Seattle on March 28.

“I told him that a few months ago because he deserves it,” Cora said. “Mookie [Betts] won’t lead off one game next year.”

White House invite?

Dombrowski had no knowledge if the Red Sox had been invited to visit the White House following their championship.

The once nonpartisan tradition has become politicized since the election of President Trump with some teams refusing invitations, other denied invitations, and some sending smaller groups of players than had once been the norm.

In September, Cora said he felt that Twitter postings by Trump that erroneously downplayed the number of Puerto Ricans killed by Hurricane Maria last year were “disrespectful.”

During the World Series, Cora also disagreed with a Twitter post by Trump that was critical of Dodgers manager Dave Roberts.

“Dave Roberts is a good manager,” Cora said.

On Thursday, Cora suggested he would have something to say at the White House if invited.

“I’ve been using this platform the right way the whole time,” he said. “We’ll talk about it as an organization and whatever we decide is going to be respected. If we decide to go, I will use my platform the right way.

“If you start looking at this team, we’ve got guys from the United States and from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Puerto Rico. I’ll use the platform the right way . . . whenever we have to make the decision we’ll make it.”

#### Offer on the table

Dombrowski answered affirmatively when asked if the Sox would make any qualifying offers. Major League Baseball will reveal those on Friday.

Craig Kimbrel seems sure to be a recipient. The free agent closer made \$13 million in 2018 but the Sox would very happily retain him for one year and \$17.9 million. By making him a qualifying offer, the Sox would receive draft-pick compensation if Kimbrel signs with another team.

Dombrowski mentioned Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier as candidates to close if the Sox lose Kimbrel. He does not see the Sox going without a set closer.

Because he was traded during the season, Nathan Eovaldi is not eligible for a qualifying offer.

Players with qualifying offers have until Nov. 12 to accept or become a free agent.

#### Dombrowski deal?

Dombrowski, 62, is entering the final season of his original five-year contract. Principal owner John Henry said Wednesday the team was “running out of time” to re-sign Dombrowski.

Dombrowski did not necessarily see it that way.

“I don’t know that we’re running out of time. I’m not really sure in that regard,” he said. “I’m thrilled and happy to be here, enjoy it a great deal, like the people with whom I work, the ownership situation has treated me great. How can you not like this situation? I like it a great deal.”

Cora also could be in for a reward. His \$800,000 salary for 2018 was tied for lowest in the majors among managers. The Sox could pick up his option for 2021 or draw up a new deal.

The team paid off \$3 million for former manager John Farrell this season.

#### Duck! boats

Cora was among the Red Sox personnel who were struck by haphazardly thrown cans of beer during Wednesday’s parade.

Patrick Connolly, 19, of Sandwich was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct when police saw him throw the can that struck Cora and his 11-year-old daughter, Camila.

“I’m good, man. I’m good,” Cora said. “I panicked because it hit me and hit my daughter. You ask my daughter, she didn’t care. I know the kid didn’t mean to hurt anybody. It’s dangerous but it is what it is . . . I just have to be ready to make that play the next time.”

The 2018 World Series trophy was slightly damaged by a flying can but quickly repaired.

“I don’t think it was a situation where anybody was trying to hurt anyone by any means,” Dombrowski said.

#### Homeward bound

Cora is scheduled to attend a charity function hosted by Pedro Martinez on Friday then return to Puerto Rico with the World Series trophy on Saturday.

Christian Vazquez and others from the team will accompany him to a celebration in his hometown of Caguas.

“It should be a cool day,” the manager said.

Ricardo Rossello, the governor of Puerto Rico, also invited Cora to the capital of San Juan for a celebration that will be held at a later date.

#### To-do list

With Kimbrel and Joe Kelly free agents, Dombrowski said the bullpen would be the focus of his offseason work. He feels the rotation is fine with Sale, Price, Porcello, and Eduardo Rodriguez returning.

The Sox also have Brian Johnson, Hector Velazquez, and Steven Wright back as rotation options.

“But you always need to be cognizant of that,” Dombrowski said.

Dombrowski said the Sox would seek further information on Wright’s surgically repaired left knee in the coming weeks. The hope is he will not need additional surgery.

Dombrowski said there has been no mandate by ownership of going back under the luxury-tax threshold, which will be \$206 million for next season.

#### Smith cut loose

Righthanded reliever Carson Smith was activated off the 60-day disabled list then declared free agency after being outrighted to Triple A Pawtucket.

Smith appeared in only 29 games for the Sox over three seasons after being acquired from Seattle. He had Tommy John elbow surgery in 2016 and this season injured his shoulder while throwing his glove in anger after being taken out of a game on May 14.

Smith required surgery that will keep him out into next season.

#### Roster moves

Pedroia, infielder Marco Hernandez, and righthander Austin Maddox were reinstated off the 60-day disabled list and returned to the 40-man roster. Righthander Justin Haley and infielder Tony Renda were outrighted off the major league roster. The 40-man roster is now at 34 . . . Dombrowski said every coach would be invited back for next season. “A couple of them” received permission to speak with other teams. The Texas Rangers, now 43 days into their managerial search, are believed to have an interest in bench coach Ron Roenicke. The Twins briefly considered third base coach Carlos Febles in their managerial search before hiring Rocco Baldelli. Texas also contacted assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett about becoming their hitting coach but presumably need to hire a manager first.

### **This is how Dave Dombrowski is working toward a Red Sox repeat**

Nick Cafardo

The last time Dave Dombrowski won a World Series was 1997 with the Marlins. It wasn’t long into November of that year that he received his marching orders for 1998 from H. Wayne Huizenga. The team owner informed Dombrowski that the championship team he had constructed needed to be dismantled. There was no money to fund the following year’s team.

It was heartbreaking news to Dombrowski, who felt that Marlins team, managed by Jim Leyland, could not only have repeated but likely won a few more. Instead of the star-studded team of Pudge Rodriguez, Moises Alou, Gary Sheffield, Edgar Renteria, Bobby Bonilla, Charles Johnson, Jeff Conine, Kevin Brown, Al Leiter, Alex Fernandez, and Robb Nen, the 1998 Marlins turned in a 54-win season.

But the good news is Dombrowski won't have to decimate this World Series team.

"It's significantly different than the last time around," Dombrowski said. "We really got away from calling ourselves the defending champions that year and it was because we didn't have a mirror image of our club. So this will be the first time in my career that we'll go to spring training with the club that is the defending champs. And we know how hard it is to repeat.

"Efforts will be made to keep as many players together as we can. But I also know baseball rules and finances make it difficult because when guys do become free agents they receive offers they can't refuse. But if you told me today that we could bring back the same club, I'd totally feel we'd be thrilled with that."

Although Dombrowski still hasn't had a meeting with Red Sox ownership on what his budget parameters will be, it's expected Dombrowski will be allowed to build a team he can repeat with. The Red Sox were the highest-payroll team in 2018 north of \$230 million. The Sox now shed Hanley Ramirez's \$22 million contract and likely Drew Pomeranz's \$9 million and Craig Kimbrel's \$13 million pacts. However, Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, and Jackie Bradley Jr are due large raises as arbitration-eligible players, and the Sox would like to sign free agents Nathan Eovaldi, Steve Pearce, and possibly Kimbrel.

Repeating is difficult. Not since the Yankees won three consecutive years from 1998-2000 has a team repeated. In recent years we thought the Cubs might do it after they won in 2016. And then we thought the Astros would, but the Red Sox eliminated them in the ALCS this year.

So that leaves the Red Sox to take their best shot. The Sox weren't able to repeat after 2004, '07, and '13, but who knows?

Dombrowski will attend the general managers' meetings next week in Carlsbad, Calif., where trade talks could begin. There likely isn't much for the Red Sox to do yet unless there are free agent losses. Dombrowski also said he planned on making qualifying offers to some of his free agents. The qualifying offer is a hefty \$17.9 million, so Kimbrel may be the only one who gets one.

Dombrowski is signed through the 2019 season, so his future is likely to be addressed at some point this offseason. Winning championships in both leagues and a stellar record of success should qualify Dombrowski for possible Hall of Fame recognition down the road.

Dombrowski indicated how happy he is to be with the Red Sox. "How can you not like the situation? I like it a great deal," he said.

But the focus now is building for 2019. Dombrowski would like nothing more than to beat the next-season hangover that so many teams experience.

Dombrowski knows that bringing everyone back is probably unrealistic.

"But I think we'll have a real strong core of our players together and we'll see how many we can bring back," he said. "I don't have any idea at this time. All things being equal, they would like to stay here. Sometimes teams make offers you can't refuse. You can't define [what will be needed] until you know who you're keeping.

"I would think we'd have to address our bullpen. A couple of key guys are free agents in Craig [Kimbrel] and Joe Kelly. Our starting pitching is pretty good there, but you always have to be cognizant of that. From a positional-player point of view I think we're all set, but again we have to find out about what exactly [Dustin Pedroia's] situation is at second base and how does he continue to progress. We have [Eduardo] Nunez and [Brock] Holt and we have Tzu-Wei Lin. We also have Michael Chavis."

Dombrowski said he likes all three catchers but suggested he's not sure the team would go with three next season. It simply wouldn't be fair to Blake Swihart to be in limbo again and not get playing time, so the

team either needs to make Swihart one of the prominent two on the roster or use him as trade bait. The Red Sox don't want to waste both Swihart's career or his athleticism.

Dombrowski said the team could solve the closer situation internally with Matt Barnes or Ryan Brasier, or re-sign Kimbrel — or seek an outside candidate.

Dombrowski also said he'd love to see Steven Wright have a huge role — either as a starter or reliever — next season. But Dombrowski said the team must get a better idea of how Wright's knee is holding up and whether they can depend on him to stay healthy.

Dombrowski was able to avoid contractual issues with David Price, who did not exercise an opt-out in his contract. Nor did Price receive any bump in his \$31 million salary after talks between Dombrowski and Price's agent.

Dombrowski cited the growing statistical data that continues to make the Red Sox a changing organization, and the challenge of combining analytics with scouting efforts. He said that in his 31 years running a baseball operations department it's been imperative that he change with the times, keep evolving.

"You're always learning and that's always the fun part of the job," Dombrowski said. "If you're close-minded you're probably not in your job very long."

And so work toward repeating begins now. The conversation he'll soon have with John Henry and Tom Werner will likely be a lot different than the one he had with Huizenga 21 years ago.

### **Puerto Rico-bound this weekend, Alex Cora looks forward to celebrating with friends and family**

Andrew Mahoney

Red Sox manager Alex Cora on Thursday talked about his plans for heading back to his hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico. He will be going on Saturday with some of the Red Sox players.

"I don't know how many will go. There's a few," said Cora. "Obviously Christian [Vazquez] is going, Eddie [Rodriguez] is going. There's people flying home, but it should be fun. We're flying in Saturday."

Cora is trying to manage expectations for when he gets back home.

"I'm trying to cut it off. I know how people back home, when they do it, they do it right and long. We're just going over the details, but it should be fun," he said. "They're expecting a lot of people. They'll treat these guys with a lot of food and beverages."

He wants to include his friends and family in the World Series celebration.

"Just show the people from back home that they're part of it. It should be a cool day," said Cora. "To be able to wear shorts and T-shirts again, that would be great."

The manager is hoping to limit the activity to Caguas.

"I actually talked to the governor after we won," said Cora. "He's a fan actually. He went to school here. I think he went to Harvard. I said, 'We'll go to San Juan whenever you feel like it later on, but let me get home first and enjoy it with the people from my hometown.'"

### **'I know the kid didn't mean to hurt anybody': Alex Cora says he is good after getting hit by a beer**

Andrew Mahoney

One day after he was struck by a beer at the Red Sox victory parade, manager Alex Cora was feeling fine.

“I’m good man, I’m good,” Cora said at a news conference Thursday. “I panicked because it kind of hit me, and it hit my daughter. You ask my daughter, she didn’t care. It’s part of it. I know the kid didn’t mean to hurt anybody. Obviously it’s dangerous, but it is what it is. I guess he apologized. I don’t know where he’s at right now, but we’re fine. I’ve just got to be ready to make that play the next time.”

Cora made some in-parade adjustments.

“I started making plays after that,” Cora joked. “They throw me two, I caught them. There were a few bottles. In the beginning I panicked honestly, but then after that, it’s part of it. I saw ’04, I saw ’07, I saw ’13. I guess the best way to put it is, they throw you a full beer, it means cheers and enjoy. It doesn’t have to be a big deal, honestly.”

One of the World Series trophies was struck by a beer, but Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski missed the incident.

“I read about the trophy getting damaged. I did not see that personally, and I wasn’t involved in any discussions about it afterwards,” said Dombrowski. “We had other things going on with the day taking place. I don’t think it was a situation where anybody was trying to hurt anyone by any means. There were beers being tossed up there at various times, and I guess other alcoholic beverages.

“It did not happen on our [Duck Boat]. We were a little bit older group — well, not all of them, some of them were younger — so we weren’t getting them tossed like some of the other guys were. So I never even saw it take place, personally, because it didn’t happen on our Duck Boat, but I don’t think anybody was trying to hurt anyone.”

### **Red Sox haven’t discussed or made a decision on White House visit**

Andrew Mahoney

The Red Sox have not discussed if they will visit the White House after capturing the 2018 World Series, according to president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and manager Alex Cora.

Dombrowski was asked Thursday if the team had been invited to the White House, and if a decision had been made whether to go.

“Not to my knowledge,” said Dombrowski. “They would not call me directly on that one though. There’s people above me that would receive that phone call.”

Cora was later asked the same question.

“I’ve been using this platform the right way the whole time. We’ll talk about it as an organization, and whatever we decide is going to be respected,” said Cora, who is a native of Puerto Rico. “If we decide to go, I will use my platform the right way. If you start looking at this team. we’ve got guys from the United States, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, so I’ll use the platform the right way.

“Like I said before, I know the headlines don’t show it, I’ve said I respect the president of the United States. I know he helped our country, so whenever we have to make the decision we’ll make it, and it’s going to be respected.”

### **Cora, Dombrowski talk beer tossing, keeping the Red Sox together next season, and more**

Andrew Mahoney

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and manager Alex Cora met with the media Thursday. Dombrowski spoke first, and was followed by Cora. Here are the highlights:

■ Dombrowski was asked about if the team had decided on which of the club's free agents they would make qualifying offers: "Yes, but we're not at liberty to announce that until Major League Baseball does that on Friday."

■ Dombrowski was asked about his future with the team: "I'm very happy here. I like it here. I don't know we're running out of time . . . I'm thrilled and happy to be here."

■ He said he hopes to keep as many players as possible, "but sometimes when guys become free agents, they receive offers they can't refuse. But if you told me today that we could bring back the same club together totally, we'd be thrilled with that. I don't think it's realistic because what you see with free agency and what that brings.

"I think we'll have a core of those players stay. I think all things being equal, they'd like to stay here, but again, sometimes people make offers to you that you can't refuse."

■ Dombrowski said he likes all three catchers (Christian Vazquez, Sandy Leon, and Blake Swihart), but acknowledges it would be unlikely that they keep all three, but not impossible.

■ The team would prefer to keep the coaching staff intact, but Dombrowski said that some members have been given permission to interview elsewhere.

■ Cora said he's good after getting hit by a beer can at Wednesday's parade. "The kid didn't mean to hurt anybody . . . We're fine . . . I've just got to be ready to make that play the next time."

■ The Sox manager said he is looking forward to bringing the World Series trophy back to Puerto Rico on Saturday.

■ Cora said the organization will discuss visiting the White House and that he'll respect whatever decision is made. "I'll use the platform the right way," he said.

■ Cora said that if Dustin Pedroia is ready (the second baseman missed nearly the entire season because of a knee injury), he will lead off on Opening Day. "That's the goal," Cora said.

■ Cora is already looking ahead to next season.

"You talk about the hangover effect next year, I don't know if this group is going to feel it. Obviously today is the beginning of a new season, but I can't wait for the offseason to be over with and get there to February, and start preaching about what we're going to do next year. We have a great core of players, young and hungry."

■ Cora was asked what he learned managing in his first year. "How to manage time. That was the challenging part of it. The baseball part of it . . . that's what I've been doing for a living. I like to spend time with my players, be out there on the field. Media requests, meetings there were a few days I fell short."

## **\* *The Boston Herald***

### **Dombrowski: Surgery unlikely for Chris Sale**

Jason Mastrodonato

Despite being scratched twice from postseason starts after throwing only 158 innings in the regular season, Chris Sale is not expected to need offseason surgery on his throwing shoulder.

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Thursday that the shoulder inflammation that bothered Sale the last few months will require only rest.

“We anticipate him to come to spring training and be 100 percent,” Dombrowski said. “And at this point, without any surgical procedures. We think everything that will take care of it is just rest.”

The Red Sox tried to take extra caution with their starting pitchers all year and will likely take that one step further in 2019, manager Alex Cora said.

There hasn't been a team to win back-to-back World Series titles since the Yankees won three straight in 1998-2000.

“Joking with Chris the other day, we had some get together, I said, ‘You might pitch, your first spring training start might be March 20 and the season starts March 27,’” Cora said. “So, we’ll talk about it. (Trainer Brad Pearson) knows we have to really take care of this guy, not only because of the (last) month, the way we did it. We were very aggressive with them.

“That’s an ongoing project already. We’ll take care of them. We have to do it. We have to do it. I mean, you saw Houston. Houston played all the way to the end, November 1, and they came out of the gates hot, throwing the ball well. So, we’ll take a look at what other teams have done the past few years and we’ll map out our own plan.”

### **Alex Cora explains what happened at the World Series parade**

Jason Mastrodonato

Alex Cora had a few things to clarify on Thursday after what took place at the World Series parade one day earlier.

As it pertains to the beer that was thrown toward him and his daughter, Camila, the Red Sox manager said he was upset at first, but then decided it wasn't that big of a deal.

“I panicked because it kind of like hit me and hit my daughter,” he said. “You ask my daughter and she didn't care. She was like, ‘hey it's part of it.’ I know the kid didn't mean to hurt anybody. Obviously it's dangerous but it is what it is. I guess he apologized. I don't know where he's at right now. But we're fine, actually. I've just gotta be ready to make that play the next time.”

Cora clarified his pre-parade comments on the stage at Fenway Park, when he called out anybody who doubted the Red Sox during the playoffs and had sharp words for what he wanted them to do.

“The New York Yankees, yeah, the sky was falling,” Cora said before the parade yesterday. “We lost Game 2 and it was panic here. Everybody said, ‘Woah, it’s over.’ Then we scored 16 at Yankee Stadium. Suck on it.”

Thursday, Cora said that he wasn't telling the Yankees to “suck on it.”

“It was the people who gave up on the team after losing Game 2,” Cora said. “It was like, really? I think Xander (Bogaerts) said it best, ‘the Yankees in four after winning 108? Give us our respect.’ We have a good team.

“That was, out of the three series, it was the one that’s really scary because it’s only five games. And you play them 19 times, we have to play them again. It’s so tough because as far as something new, they’re not going to reinvent the way they play in two or three days. They were going to do it the way they did it the whole season. There were no secrets or tendencies that they didn’t know about us or we didn’t know about them. So playing them right away, that was a grind. I’m glad we won.”

The Red Sox seemed to feed off any outside views that questioned the Red Sox' chances of winning.

“About the bullpen, yeah,” Cora said. “You’ll have to talk to (pitching coach Dana LeVangie) later on whenever you can. They used everything they heard, everything they saw, to their advantage. I think Dana had a meeting with them. It’s not that they needed it, because I believe in September, the way things were going as far as stuff, we were up there, velocity-wise. And I knew we were going to attack guys differently in October. There were a lot of fastballs up and they did an outstanding job.

“But that group, they took it personally. I’m glad they did what they did. That was fun to watch. As far as the panicking thing, not really. I don’t think they get caught up on what people talk about them. The first time I realized some of them did was Xander’s comments after the first series. But I never mentioned it to them, never did the, ‘rah-rah, hey, let’s go, they don’t believe in you.’ The only thing that really mattered was the way we felt about our team and they did it. They were really consistent about it.”

Cora was also asked on Thursday about the Red Sox attending the White House. Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said the team had not yet been invited, to the best of his knowledge.

If the Sox are invited, Cora said, “I’ve been using this platform the right way the whole time. We’ll talk about it as an organization. Whatever we decide is going to be respected. If we decide to go I will use my platform the right way. I mean, if you start looking at this team we’ve got guys from the United States and from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Puerto Rico. So I’ll use the platform the right way. Like I said before, and I know the headlines don’t show it, I said I respect the president of the United States and I know he helped our country. So whenever we have to make that decision we’ll make it and it’s going to be respected.”

Cora will bring the World Series trophy to his hometown of Caguas in Puerto Rico this weekend.

"I don't know how many people will go," he said. "There's a few. Obviously Christian (Vazquez) is going. Eddie (Rodriguez) is going. There's a few that, there's people going home, flying home. But it should be fun. We fly in Saturday....They're expecting a lot of people. Treat these guys with a lot of food and beverages and just show the people from back home that they're part of it."

### **Dave Dombrowski sees stability for Red Sox**

Michael Silverman

Twenty-one years ago, after his Marlins won the World Series, Dave Dombrowski lit the match on the biggest fire sale baseball’s ever seen on a championship team. Nearly everybody had to go and beginning in November Dombrowski dealt away payroll hogs like Kevin Brown, Moises Alou, Jeff Conine, Robb Nen and Devon White until then-owner Wayne Huizenga was satisfied he could control his losses.

Dombrowski, however, was never satisfied.

Tearing apart a champion is deflating work, anathema to any executive whose job is to promote winning, and it’s why Dombrowski could never bear uttering the words “defending champions” when it came to the decimated 1998 Marlins.

That won’t be the case this November and for the rest of the offseason.

The day after his first duck boat parade, Dombrowski offered a first glimpse at the club’s relatively light workload this offseason.

The best thing about Dombrowski’s upcoming offseason is that most everyone from this year’s championship club is returning next season.

“This will really be the first time my career we’re going to spring training as part of a club that we’d consider the defending champions and we know how hard that is to repeat, but I think efforts will be made to keep as many players together as we can ideally,” said Dombrowski. “But I also know baseball rules, finances, make it difficult because sometimes your guys become free agents and receive offers they can’t refuse. But if you told me today we could bring the same club back together totally and fit in everything, we’d be thrilled with that.

“I don’t think that’s probably realistic because you see in free agency and what that brings but I would think we’ll have a real core of our group of players together and we’ll find out and see how many of our guys actually stay.”

Of all the free agents who could leave — closer Craig Kimbrel, Steve Pearce, Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly, Drew Pomeranz, Brandon Phillips and Ian Kinsler — perhaps Kimbrel and Kelly top the list. Kimbrel will likely ink an immense multiyear contract that would be too rich for even the Red Sox, and Kelly lifted his stock with his scintillating October that it seems reasonable to expect that some team could give him a closer package. Given that Dombrowski said he considered Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier as internal candidates for closer, both Kelly and Kimbrel are iffy returns.

It’s why Dombrowski singled out the bullpen as the area of greatest need, even though it’s still early to declare so.

“I don’t think you can define it until you know who you’re keeping,” said Dombrowski, but if “you lost everybody, which I don’t anticipate happening but if it did, I would think somehow we would need to address our bullpen at that point. Because those couple guys are free agents at that point, Craig is and Joe Kelly is.

“Our starting pitching, we’re pretty good there, but you always need to be cognizant of that from a positional player perspective, I think we’re pretty well set.”

One mystery position will be second base.

The club still does not have a firm handle on whether or not Dustin Pedroia and his surgically repaired knee can be relied upon for a full season, although manager Alex Cora did guarantee that Pedroia would lead off Game 1 of next season and only Game 1.

“We need to find out exactly what Pedey’s situation is at second base, I think that’s something that will be a focus for us now,” said Dombrowski. “We have talked about it but how does he continue to progress, we’re hopeful he’ll be ready but I don’t really know at this time. But with (Eduardo) Nunez and (Brock) Holt with us already and we’ve got Tzu-Wei Lin behind them, we’ve got some depth there. We’ve got a guy like Michael Chavis that’s coming in up in the organization and gives us a little depth depending on where we decided to play him.”

The Red Sox have three catchers — Sandy Leon, Christian Vazquez and Blake Swihart — and Dombrowski hinted that that could allow for the Red Sox to consider moving one of them rather than carry all three like the club did for all of the 2018 season.

“We like all three of them — I’d say it’s unlikely but not impossible that you have three guys,” said Dombrowski. “They all have their strengths, but I’m not really sure where that’s going to take us at this point. We’re not looking to trade anybody per se but sometimes it could be a position of strength.”

That last part — the “we’re not looking to trade anybody” part — that’s the part that Dombrowski was all too happy to say yesterday.

Twenty-one years ago, the complete opposite was his truth.

**Red Sox move on from oft-injured reliever Carson Smith**

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox are moving on from right-hander Carson Smith, one of the best relievers in baseball in 2015 who has been mostly injured in the three years since.

He was eligible for arbitration going into the 2019 season but the Sox decided to outright him off the major league roster instead. Smith has elected free agency.

After recovering from Tommy John surgery for most of 2016-17, the 29-year-old finally looked strong at the end of 2017. He looked to be a key member of the Sox' bullpen early in 2018 until he hurt his shoulder while throwing his glove in the dugout after coming out of a game in May and needed season-ending shoulder surgery.

Asked for comment on why the Red Sox chose to move on from Smith rather than bring him back at a low cost for 2019, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said via email, "We are unsure when he will be able to pitch next season after his surgery this year."

While Smith accepted most of the blame for hurting himself, he also stuck some of it on the Red Sox when he suggested his workload (five outings in seven days, but just 59 pitches in those outings) was related to the injury.

"I think my shoulder's tired in general, just from pitching," Smith said in May. "I've thrown a lot lately and I think my arm was just tired."

Manager Alex Cora soon responded and said flatly, "I don't agree with it. On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't think they can pitch that day, we stay away from them."

Smith was originally acquired from Seattle for Wade Miley and Jonathan Aro in one of Dave Dombrowski's first moves as president of baseball operations. Smith had a 2.31 ERA and 92 strikeouts in 70 innings with the Mariners in 2015 before he was traded.

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

### **Tough part begins for Red Sox front office**

Bill Koch

BOSTON — The natural inclination any time you field a championship team is to return its players and coaching staff intact for the following season.

Few members of Red Sox Nation would like to see any key pieces of the ninth World Series title winner in franchise history move on.

Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly, Craig Kimbrel and Steve Pearce are some of Boston's latest sporting heroes. They also happen to be free agents — along with Ian Kinsler, Drew Pomeranz and Brandon Phillips — and are standing at the intersection of sport and business.

Building their 2019 roster is about to be an increasingly complicated calculation for the Red Sox, and that's due to the performances of some of their core players. Rick Porcello, Chris Sale, Xander Bogaerts, Mitch Moreland, Brock Holt and Tyler Thornburg hit free agency in 2020, and J.D. Martinez could opt out of the five-year deal he signed prior to 2018. Another blockbuster class is on tap for 2021, headlined by Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. Boston will need to keep some cash in reserve to secure both its short- and long-term future while attempting to remain in contention with the likes of the Yankees and Astros.

According to Cot's Contracts, a database operated by Baseball Prospectus, the Red Sox already figure to be about \$8.5 million over the competitive balance tax threshold of \$206 million for 2019. David Price opting into the final four years of the seven-year deal he signed prior to the 2016 season saddles Boston with an average annual value of \$31 million through 2022. Price pitching like the ace he was over much of the second half and his final three playoff starts makes that figure far more palatable than it was in spring training, for example, but it still represents a significant chunk of change.

Sale's 2019 club option counts for \$15 million against the tax, and Eduardo Nunez has exercised his player option at \$5 million. The Red Sox also figure to pay out several hefty arbitration awards, including upwards of \$19 million to Betts, \$11 million to Bogaerts and close to \$9 million for Bradley. Exceeding the final luxury tax threshold for the second straight year — this time likely to be set at around \$248 million — would carry penalties including another 10-spot drop in the June draft and a 45-percent surtax on all overages.

Kimbrel is the active leader in saves at 333 and seems to possess a single-mindedness to challenge Mariano Rivera and Trevor Hoffman among the all-time leaders in that category. The right-hander is a throwback in the sense that it would be unlikely to see him in any high leverage spots outside the ninth inning, and even in the postseason it seemed somewhat out of place when Boston extended him to more than three outs. As a 30-year-old whose 2017 campaign was better than his 2018 season, the Red Sox could be wary of meeting the market value at four or five years and something approaching \$70 million.

Kelly was nails out of the bullpen in October, particularly in the Fall Classic. He pitched in all five games, tossing 6 1/3 scoreless innings and striking out 10 against no walks. That ice-cold performance and Kelly's raw stuff could persuade a team — perhaps even Boston — to view him as a potential closer, and the market at that position could likely take him out of range.

How close is a prospect such as Michael Chavis, Josh Ockimey or Bobby Dalbec to breaking through? That could alter how the Red Sox look at their position player depth, particularly at first base. Mitch Moreland is a bargain at \$6.5 million in 2019, and platooning him with Pearce on a one-year deal could be ideal to buy time for some of those young bats to make the required progress. Pearce is a nice fit in the Boston clubhouse and figures to be in for a raise from the \$6.25 million he took home this season.

Eovaldi could be the most difficult player to project due to a confluence of circumstances. He threw only 111 innings in the regular season while making his way back from a second Tommy John surgery. But Eovaldi's postseason performance was nothing short of spectacular, as he won two games against New York and Houston as a starter and allowed just one hit over 3 1/3 innings in his first three appearances as a relief pitcher.

Then there was the marathon Game 3 against the Dodgers, an 18-inning classic in which Eovaldi threw 97 pitches out of the bullpen. His willingness to sacrifice a first World Series start for his teammates and now proven ability to withstand postseason pressure are both valuable commodities. The Red Sox could be tested to retain the right-hander if another club comes in at four or five years and pushes \$80 million or more.

It would be surprising if Kinsler, Phillips or Pomeranz are retained. Boston's infield picture will be cluttered by Nunez and Rafael Devers at third base, Holt and the returning Dustin Pedroia (left knee) at second base and potential utility options such as Tzu-Wei Lin and Marco Hernandez. The Red Sox also would seem to have a fair amount of starting pitching depth with Sale, Price, Porcello, Eduardo Rodriguez, Steven Wright, Hector Velazquez and Brian Johnson all under contract for 2019.

The Yankees were the last team to repeat as champions, capturing three straight from 1998 to 2000. The Phillies were last in position to do so, capturing the 2008 title against Tampa Bay and falling to New York in six games in 2009. The business done by the Red Sox over the next couple weeks could go a long way toward determining whether or not they'll be among the final clubs standing next October.

**Now that they've silenced the doubters, Red Sox bask in vindication**

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Turns out we might not have known this Red Sox team as well as we thought.

Anyone could see the expected strong collection of talent on the field. Postgame comments from players were professional and somewhat reserved, right in line with what is generally heard in clubhouses and locker rooms these days.

But underneath simmered a certain brand of resentment that boiled over once the calendar flipped to October. Boston took no prisoners while steamrolling its way through the playoffs, and its ninth World Series championship in franchise history was celebrated with a vindicating rolling rally through the city on Wednesday.

The combined 1-6 record in the past two American League Division Series appearances and resulting criticism appears to have had a galvanizing effect. Emotions came out in dribs and drabs once it was clear these Red Sox were a cut above some of their most recent predecessors. Vanquishing the 100-win Yankees, 100-win Astros and two-time National League champion Dodgers was a gauntlet Boston ran through all too easily.

“It’s a tribute to all of these guys,” Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Sunday night in Los Angeles, a clinching 5-1 victory in Game 5 already secured. “You don’t get to that point unless you’re talented, but you grind. You really work through things. You bounce back, you’re resilient and you’re tough. And that’s this group.”

Was it really? These couldn’t have been the same Red Sox who bowed so meekly to Cleveland and Houston in each of the past two seasons. Aside from firing manager John Farrell, hiring manager Alex Cora and signing free-agent slugger J.D. Martinez, this wasn’t a starkly different group from the one that fell to the eventual champion Astros in four games last season.

Until it was. Until this roster steamrolled to a franchise-record 108 wins in the regular season. Until this group rebuffed a multi-pronged assault from skeptical fans and media alike, with Boston’s overall character questioned as much as its performance on the field.

“It’s hard to put into words, but I finally realize what the grind is,” said pitcher Chris Sale, who recorded the final three outs of the season. “This is a grind.”

What was Aaron Judge thinking? The Yankees stole home field advantage from the Red Sox in the American League Division Series thanks to a 6-2 victory in Game 2, and Judge strolled out of Fenway Park with ‘New York, New York’ playing from a sound system perched on his shoulder. That same song was heard three nights later in the visiting clubhouse at Yankee Stadium when Boston clinched the best-of-5 series win, including a 16-1 thumping in Game 3.

“The sky was falling,” Cora said at Wednesday’s rally. “We lost Game 2, and it was panic here. Everybody was like, ‘Whoa, it’s over!’”

“Then we scored 16 [runs] at Yankee Stadium. Suck on it.”

What was Alex Bregman thinking? Trying to troll Nathan Eovaldi on Instagram over some home runs he allowed with Tampa Bay against Houston in June seemed a bit out of touch. This was a different pitcher who roared into the American League Championship Series, one who notched an 8-2 victory in Game 3 and came out of the bullpen for 1 1/3 scoreless innings to help lock down the clinching Game 5.

“I feel I’m a completely different pitcher,” Eovaldi said prior to Game 3, foreshadowing his pair of strong outings. “I’m attacking it a lot differently.”

What was Manny Machado thinking? He loafed down the line on one particular single off the wall in left field, failed to beat out a grounder to a sprawling Rafael Devers at deep third and buried his cleats into the heel of his good friend Steve Pearce at first base. At best Machado was flaky, at worst petulant and weak-minded — two things the Red Sox were certainly not against the Dodgers.

“We grind together,” said Pearce, who was named the series Most Valuable Player thanks to his three home runs. “And I think that’s one of the best things that probably sum up our season. We’re together.”

That’s how Boston’s fourth championship club of this century will be remembered. There was a certain amount of dirt under their fingernails, a lunch-pail gang at heart masterfully directed by Cora through seven months of brilliant baseball. Perhaps we all should have seen this coming in the first place.

## **\* *MassLive.com***

### **Boston Red Sox introduced as World Series champions to huge ovation at Boston Celtics vs. Bucks**

Tom Westerholm

BOSTON -- The Boston Red Sox were introduced as World Series champions on Thursday during a timeout break in the Boston Celtics' matchup with the Milwaukee Bucks.

The Red Sox, who finished off the Los Angeles Dodgers in a 4-1 series victory on Sunday, seemed to surprise the Celtics crowd, which quickly erupted and stayed on its feet until the Red Sox left the floor.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora hoisted the trophy through most of the timeout.

After a few minutes, Cora passed it off to David Price, who received perhaps the loudest ovation.

Brad Stevens didn't say much during the timeout, allowing his team to turn and watch the ovation. The Celtics applauded as well, and Al Horford congratulated several of the players.

After the Red Sox left the floor, Celtics fans broke into an enthusiastic chant of "Yankees suck."

Watch the video above for the full reception.

### **Michael Chavis, Boston Red Sox top prospect, could play some second base, left field during 2019**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora promised Dustin Pedroia he'll hit leadoff on Opening Day 2019 as a reward if he returns healthy by then. Mookie Betts then will return to the leadoff spot in Game 2 of the regular season.

But Pedroia's ability to return healthy from his knee injury in 2019 is a major question mark.

The second baseman underwent a left knee cartilage restoration procedure Oct. 25, 2017. He then played in just three games and took 11 at-bats during 2018.

He began the season on the disabled list. The Red Sox activated him May 25. He returned to the DL on June 2. He had scar tissue removed during an arthroscopic surgery in late July in Arizona.

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski mentioned top prospect Michael Chavis as one of the team's depth options at second base when discussing Pedroia's unknown status for 2019.

The organization has discussed Chavis playing some second base.

Chavis has appeared in 244 minor league games at third base, 15 games at shortstop and 12 games at first base. He hasn't started a game at shortstop since 2014 in the Gulf Coast League.

He played some first base last year after returning from his 80-game PED suspension.

"With Michael, we've talked about a lot of different things," Dombrowski said. "We're pretty deep at third base. He's played some first base, too.

"He's taken groundballs at second base," Dombrowski added. "We've even talked about hitting him some flyballs in left field at some time. Where he's going to go and what happens, he may play all of them at some point when we're in a position to just kind of see how we stack up because he's a good, young player that swings the bat very well. He's athletic enough. But we really haven't decided where he's going to play his concentrated amount of time going into next year."

Chavis slashed .298/.381/.538/.919 with nine homers, 14 doubles and 27 RBIs in 46 games (33 at Double-A Portland, eight at Triple-A Pawtucket, five at Short Season Lowell) in 2018 after returning from his suspension.

### **Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier candidates for Boston Red Sox 2019 closer job if Craig Kimbrel leaves as free agent**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier are the two leading internal candidates to take over as Red Sox closer if Craig Kimbrel leaves via free agency.

Kimbrel is the only Red Sox free agent likely to receive a qualifying offer from the team Friday. Kimbrel also likely will turn down the qualifying offer to pursue a multi-year contract in free agency.

"We do think we have a situation where internally we have a couple candidates to do that (be the closer)," Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said. "Barnes and Brasier are the top candidates. They are not Craig Kimbrel at this point of their careers. But I don't think we'd go into closer-by-committee approach. So if it wasn't Craig, it would be either them or we'd have to see what other alternatives existed outside of the organization."

Brasier posted a 1.60 ERA, 2.83 FIP and 0.77 WHIP in 34 outings (33 2/3 innings) for Boston during the regular season. He allowed just one earned run in 8.2 innings during the postseason.

Barnes posted a 3.65 ERA, 2.71 FIP and 1.26 WHIP in 62 outings (61.2 innings) during the regular season. He allowed just one run in 8.2 innings during the postseason.

Durbin Feltman, a 2018 third-round draft pick out of TCU, also has a chance to earn a spot in the 2019 Red Sox bullpen. Feltman throws his fastball in the upper-90s and features a wipeout slider.

### **Boston Red Sox catchers 2019: 'Unlikely but not impossible' Christian Vazquez, Blake Swihart, Sandy Leon all remain on roster**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- The Red Sox likely will part ways with one of their three catchers this offseason.

They carried Blake Swihart, Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon during the 2018 regular season and postseason.

"We like them all," president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Thursday at Fenway Park. "That's why we haven't made any moves in the past. I never got an offer that we really thought was (good enough). As you know, earlier in the season we were open-minded toward Blake's situation. But we like all three of them.

"I'd say it's unlikely but not impossible that you'd have three guys," Dombrowski added. "They all have their strengths. But I'm not really sure where that's going to take us at this point."

Swihart made the fewest starts at catcher. He's the best hitter of the three. He posted a .278/.331/.426/.757 line with three homers, eight doubles and 15 RBIs in 124 plate appearances (46 games) when he played more regularly from June 1 through the end of the season.

Leon is known as the catcher who all the pitchers prefer throwing to, but he slashed only .177/.232/.279/.511 in 89 games.

Christian Vazquez played the most during the postseason, starting 10 of 14 games. He slashed .207/.257/.283/.540 in 80 regular season games. His OPS dropped from .735 in 2017.

Both Swihart and Leon are arbitration eligible this coming offseason. Leon is in his second year of arbitration. Swihart will be in his first year.

Vazquez signed a three-year, \$13.55 million contract extension through 2021 last spring training. It includes a \$7 million team option and \$250,000 buyout for 2022.

"If you only take two of them, there's only three ways you can go and I'm not sure which way we would go," Dombrowski said. "It would just depend upon maybe if we had discussions with other clubs where that would take us. We're not looking to trade anybody, per se."

### **Boston Red Sox cut Carson Smith: Reliever elects free agency after three seasons**

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox reliever Carson Smith elected free agency after clearing waivers, according to a team announcement.

Boston also outrighted Tony Renda and Justin Haley off the 40-man roster and moved Dustin Pedroia, Marco Hernandez and Austin Maddox off the 60-day disabled list.

Smith, 29, was originally acquired in a trade that sent Wade Miley and Jonathan Aro to the Mariners in Dec. 2015. The righty had posted a 2.31 ERA while striking out 92 in 70 innings in 2015 and was expected to be a major piece in Boston's bullpen.

Smith made three appearances in 2016 before undergoing Tommy John surgery in May and being sidelined for the large part of two seasons. He made eight appearances in Sept. 2017, allowing just one earned run in 6.2 innings.

Smith was healthy at the beginning of the 2018 campaign, pitching to a 3.77 ERA in 14.1 innings before suffering a shoulder subluxation while throwing his glove in anger in mid-May. The glove throw would cost Smith his season, as he missed the rest of the campaign after undergoing surgery in June.

In total, Smith made just 29 appearances over three years with the Red Sox, owning a 2.66 ERA in 23.2 innings and recording one save. He was arbitration-eligible this winter after earning \$850k last year, so the move saves the team some money in addition to opening up a 40-man roster spot.

Renda and Haley both made minor contributions in 2018 and, like Smith, will receive a World Series ring.

## \* **RedSox.com**

### **Surgery unlikely for Sale; Pedroia's status unclear**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Just a day after the World Series parade, the Red Sox had no choice but to start looking ahead to next season. The pace of the offseason dictates that.

One thing the Red Sox do expect is that ace Chris Sale will be fully healthy for 2019. The lanky lefty, who closed out the World Series with a wicked slider to strike out Manny Machado, isn't expected to need surgery this winter to fix the left shoulder that sent him to the disabled list twice in the second half of the season.

"We anticipate him to come to Spring Training and be 100 percent," said president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. "At this point, without any surgical procedures. We think everything that will take care of it is just rest. So that's really where we are. But we don't anticipate anything from a surgical procedure, whatsoever."

Things aren't quite as certain regarding second baseman Dustin Pedroia, who played in just three games this year due to major surgery on his left knee.

Is second base a position of need?

"I can't answer that until I find out really what Pedey's situation is," Dombrowski said. "I don't really have that answer yet. There will be timeframes ... It'll be something we'll have to focus in on over the next time period. I know he's hopeful, we're hopeful."

And if Pedroia can make it back for Opening Day, he will be the first Red Sox player to take an at-bat in 2019.

"I still expect him to contribute," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "Like I told him, you guys can go ahead and write it, if he's ready to go, that's the only game he's going to lead off next year. He'll lead off Opening Day in Seattle. I told him that a few months ago because he deserves it. Mookie [Betts] won't lead off one game next year. That's the goal."

Here were some other items of interest discussed by Dombrowski and Cora in their season-ending sessions with the media on Thursday.

#### Qualifying offers, free agents

The Red Sox have until 5 p.m. ET on Friday to extend \$17.9 million qualifying offers to any of their free agents who weren't acquired in the middle of the season. This list includes closer Craig Kimbrel, setup man Joe Kelly and lefty Drew Pomeranz.

Kimbrel is the only one of those three who would likely be under consideration to receive a qualifying offer. Making a qualifying offer allows the Red Sox to receive Draft compensation should Kimbrel sign elsewhere.

Postseason heroes Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce are among the other Red Sox players eligible for free agency. Dombrowski has interest in retaining both of them, in addition to Kimbrel and Kelly.

"We know how hard that is to repeat, but I think efforts will be made to keep as many players together as we can ideally," said Dombrowski. "But I also know baseball rules, finances, make it difficult because sometimes your guys become free agents and receive offers they can't refuse. But if you told me today we could bring the same club back together totally and fit in everything, we'd be thrilled with that."

If Kimbrel leaves, Dombrowski said that Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier are two internal candidates who could have a chance to be upgraded to closer.

The Red Sox went over the luxury tax threshold last season, and Dombrowski said ownership has given no indication yet that he'll have to get under it for '19.

#### Catch-22

The Red Sox were in the rare position of carrying three catchers for almost all of last season and into the postseason. But it's a plan that might not be sustainable going forward. With Christian Vazquez establishing himself as the team's primary catcher in October after signing a contract extension in March, that would leave the club to decide between Sandy Leon and Blake Swihart as the backup.

Leon is the best pure defender of the catching crew, but his offensive skills are limited. Swihart is a switch-hitter who can also play corner infield and outfield. This means that he is valuable to the Red Sox but could also be a trade chip that could help the Red Sox fill another need.

"We like them all, that's why we haven't made any moves in the past. We like all three of them," said Dombrowski. "I'd say it's unlikely but not impossible that you have three guys. They all have their strengths, but I'm not really sure where that's going to take us at this point. If you only take two of them, there's only three ways you could go, and I'm not sure which way we'd go. It would just depend upon if we had discussions with other clubs where that would take us. We're not looking to trade anybody per se, but sometimes it could be a position of strength."

#### Next trip for trophy: Puerto Rico

The World Series trophy will be taking a field trip this weekend to Cora's hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico. Vazquez and lefty Eduardo Rodriguez will also join in on the celebration, which will take place on Saturday.

"We're just going over the details. But it should be fun," said Cora. "They're expecting a lot of people. Treat these guys with a lot of food and beverages and just show the people from back home that they're part of it. So it should be a cool day. To be able to wear shorts and T-shirts again, yeah, that'll be great."

Cora said he will try to get the trophy to San Juan at some point this offseason as well.

#### **Only constant in 4 Sox World Series? Owners**

Mike Lupica

Back in January of 2002, Major League Baseball approved the sale of the Boston Red Sox to an ownership group led by John Henry, who previously had owned the Marlins. By sheer sporting coincidence, the New England Patriots, owned by Robert Kraft, won the first of their five Super Bowls two weeks later. Since then, of course, Kraft has clearly established himself as one of the great sports owners in history.

But over nearly 17 years, the Patriots have effectively had the same general manager and coach: Bill Belichick. It is different with the Red Sox, who have won four World Series over the same time span, and done so with three different general managers, three different managers and two team presidents.

The only constant has been the ownership group, led by Henry and Tom Werner. The majority owner at the beginning, and now, is Henry, who has proven two things as he has taken his place with the great baseball owners: He is not afraid of spending money to win and not afraid of change. History has now judged that the previous Commissioner of Baseball, Bud Selig, chose wisely when he chose Henry in 2002, knowing that he and Werner were bringing Larry Lucchino, one of the smartest and best sports executives of them all, along with them to Fenway Park.

So Lucchino was team president when the Red Sox started winning the World Series again, after 86 years when they sure did not. Now one of his proteges, Sam Kennedy, is team president.

The Red Sox won the World Series in 2004 and '07 with the combination of Theo Epstein as general manager and Terry Francona as manager. In '13, Ben Cherington was GM and John Farrell was manager as the Red Sox won again. Now they win with Dave Dombrowski in charge of the baseball operation in Boston and Alex Cora as his manager. This is the one about how the more things change, at least with the Red Sox, the more they stay the same.

On Thursday, I mentioned to Henry that with the changes the Red Sox have made in the front office and in the dugout, there has been one constant: His ownership group, with him and Werner out front, and finally back on the stage with four World Series trophies at the end of the Red Sox's duck boat parade on Wednesday.

"[Other constants] are baseball operations and those on the business side who generate our revenues," Henry said.

Even with all that, come on, he is allowed to take a bow as the owner of what he described at Dodger Stadium after Game 5 and said again on Wednesday was the best Red Sox team of all time.

"Bowling to your wisdom on this matter," Henry joked. "It was quite a year."

Quite a year. So many things broke right for the 2018 Sox, in many of the same ways that things broke right for them five years ago, when David Ortiz, in his last great moment in Boston, was one of the great October hitters of all time and carried the Cherington/Farrell Red Sox to their third World Series since '04. The Red Sox fell to last place the next season and the season after that. Cherington was asked to leave first. Farrell was asked to leave after the '17 Red Sox lost in the first round of the playoffs for the second straight year.

So the last five seasons absolutely turned into a theme-park ride in Boston. Dombrowski was brought in to replace Cherington. Dombrowski brought in Cora, who would end up having the best October any manager has ever had, to replace Farrell. Then Dombrowski was allowed by ownership to spend more money on baseball players, nearly \$230 million worth, more than anybody else in the sport.

All of that produced a total of 119 victories for the Red Sox. They won the American League East by eight games. They beat the Yankees, 3-1, in the AL Division Series. They beat the defending champion Astros, 4-1, in the AL Championship Series. The Red Sox beat the Dodgers, 4-1, in the World Series, and perhaps were one Ian Kinsler error in extra innings in Game 4 from sweeping their third Series in this century.

Sometimes the model franchise doesn't have to be the Patriots, with all of their continuity at the top. The Yankees pride themselves on the fact that they've had just one general manager since Henry and Werner and their group got the Red Sox and just three managers. And there is justifiable pride in New York that the Yankees never have a losing season.

But they have won just one World Series since Henry's group got the Red Sox and Lucchino let everybody know that the Red Sox weren't trying to win the past from the Yankees, nobody could do that. Instead, the Red Sox were about to start their rivalry with the Yankees all over again. It was Lucchino who first called the Yankees the "Evil Empire." It was another way of saying, "Game on."

Now the Red Sox win again. They have a deep, young, gifted, resilient team. Dombrowski just had the best season of his career. Everybody saw Cora, from the dugout, perform like a total star. They all deserve the praise they have gotten in Boston. So, too, do the owners.

**\* *WEEI.com***

## **The Carson Smith era with Red Sox is over**

Rob Bradford

The guy who was once thought to have a chance to replace Craig Kimbrel as the Red Sox' closer is gone before Kimbrel could even become a free agent.

The Red Sox announced Thursday that they had outrighted Carson Smith from the major league roster, leading the reliever to elect free agency.

Smith, who was acquired with Roenis Elias from Seattle for Jonathan Aro and Wade Miley, pitched in 18 games for the Red Sox in 2018 before needing right shoulder surgery. The 29-year-old appeared in just 11 games prior to this past season, undergoing Tommy John surgery early in the 2016 campaign.

The relationship between Smith and the Red Sox appeared fractured after he insinuated that early-season over-use had led to his shoulder injury, which was brought on by the pitcher throwing his glove in anger.

Manager Alex Cora responded to Smith's assertions.

"I don't agree with it," Cora said. "I don't agree with it. On a daily basis, we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way he should've told it to us or he should've mentioned it. There was a day in New York or Toronto, New York I think, we talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

Smith would have been heading into his second year of being arbitration-eligible before Thursday's transaction.

Other moves announced by the team included Dustin Pedroia, Austin Maddox and Marco Hernandez being reinstated to the major league roster from the 60-day disabled list. Tony Renda and Justin Haley were outright from the big league roster.

## **Ryan Brasier, Matt Barnes in mix to potentially replace Craig Kimbrel**

Rob Bradford

The Craig Kimbrel question isn't coming out of the blue.

Kimbrel has always figured to be one of the tougher decisions when he hits the free agent market, which will be in the coming weeks. He's a closer who is likely in line to set a record for largest contract given to a player at his position, most likely surpassing Aroldis Chapman's five-year, \$86 million deal.

The Red Sox will likely extend a qualifying offer to Kimbrel, which would pay the pitcher \$17.9 million if he accepted the one-year deal and give the Sox a draft pick if he doesn't. But the more plausible scenario is the 30-year-old getting his dream deal.

"Look at this team. It's kind of hard to say no to that," said Kimbrel when asked if he wanted to return to the Red Sox. "If we can work something out I would be more than pleased to stay here for a few more years."

It's a topic that was broached by Dave Dombrowski Thursday morning, as well.

"We do think that we do have a situation where internally we have a couple candidates to do that. (Matt) Barnes and (Ryan) Brasier are the top candidates," said the Red Sox president of baseball operations. "They're not Craig Kimbrel at this point in their careers. But I don't think we go into the closer by committee approach. So if it wasn't Craig it'd be either them or we'd have to see what other alternatives existed outside the organization."

While Barnes' stuff and production are intriguing, in terms of experience in the role Brasier would seem to have the upper-hand.

It might be hard to envision a guy who was playing in the minor leagues in Japan a season ago becoming the replacement for Kimbrel but Brasier's history and 2018 production suggests this might be a very real alternative. It's a scenario he admitted to at least contemplating.

"It is what it is. I'm sure they will go get somebody if we don't sign him back. But that would be cool," Brasier told WEEL.com Thursday afternoon regarding potentially getting the opportunity to close. "It definitely has crossed my mind about him not coming back. But at the same time, I'm just trying to make it out of spring training."

Brasier has 78 career minor-league saves to his credit, not having got an opportunity yet to close out a big league game. In 8 2/3 postseason innings, the righty allowed just one run while holding opponents to a .219 batting average.

Some of the free agent closer who will be available this offseason include Zach Britton, Andrew Miller, David Robertson, Sergio Romo, Cody Allen and Jeury's Familia.

### **What another year of Eduardo Nunez looks like**

Rob Bradford

Eduardo Nunez will be back with the Red Sox in 2019. The player and team made that official Thursday.

Nunez had a \$5 million player option he exercised for next season, choosing the deal over getting a \$2 million buyout from the Red Sox which would have allowed him to become a free agent.

So, what now for Nunez?

Part of the plan for the 31-year-old was as a fail-safe at second base while Dustin Pedroia got healthy. But because of Nunez's right knee injury, the position was not a good fit. Eventually, he found his sweet spot in the infield at third base, sharing time with Rafael Devers.

But with Pedroia potentially returning in 2019 and the Red Sox hoping Devers starts evolving into an everyday third baseman, where will that leave Nunez? The Red Sox' utility infielder will continue to be Brock Holt, who will be the one offering protection at second base this time around. That would seem to limit the usefulness of Nunez.

The righty hitter obviously can still serve a purpose, particularly as a fail-safe if Devers struggles at all. With another offseason getting that right knee 100 percent, this is a player -- who we saw at times throughout the postseason -- can add valuable offensive punch (albeit not the kind of power the 22-year-old alternative possesses).

Much of Nunez's role will depend on Pedroia's status and Devers' evolution. He has also played outfield and shortstop, but neither of those spots seem anything more than break-glass-in-case-of-emergency kind of options.

In a nutshell, at \$5 million, Nunez's presence is probably not the worst insurance policy, and even teams coming off 119-win seasons need some of those.

### **Dave Dombrowski gave John Henry a choice, and the result was a World Series title**

John Tomase

Dave Dombrowski's suite was a whirlwind of activity at the 2016 Winter Meetings as the clock ticked on a potential blockbuster.

The Red Sox had an opportunity to acquire White Sox ace Chris Sale, but the cost would be steep, starting with top prospects Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech. Dombrowski reached out to owners John Henry and Tom Werner with a question:

"Would you like to win a championship now and trade the young players?" Dombrowski recalls asking.

Henry's answer was no. He wanted to maintain the slow build. Werner erred on the side of the known commodity and favored pulling the trigger on Sale.

"But you know what?" Henry told Dombrowski. "It's your decision,"

Not even two years later, it's hard to argue with the results. The Red Sox hired Dombrowski to accelerate their title aspirations after the methodical tenure of predecessor Ben Cherington, who built a behemoth of a farm system that Dombrowski promptly gutted to acquire the veteran talent that brought Boston a World Series championship and franchise-record 108-win season.

Dombrowski may have been undertaking a dangerous dance – the window will start closing on this group in the next couple of years as Xander Bogaerts, Mookie Betts, and Jackie Bradley reach free agency – but the ends justified the means. Whatever the current state of the Red Sox farm system, it hardly matters, because Dombrowski delivered a title.

"I'm fortunate," Dombrowski said on the field after beating the Dodgers in Game 5 of the World Series. "It's the young players that were left by the other people, Mike Hazen, Ben Cherington, Amiel Sawdaye, you tip our cap to all of them. When you win like that throughout the league, it starts at the top and that's ownership. They want to win, they're willing to spend, and they have the wherewithal to do it."

While it's true that Dombrowski traded a number of the team's top prospects, he was also smart about whom he kept – he memorably refused to include third baseman Rafael Devers in the Sale deal – and he used his farm system to acquire impact talent.

Sale, closer Craig Kimbrel, right-hander Nathan Eovaldi, second baseman Ian Kinsler, infielder Eduardo Nunez, and first baseman Steve Pearce were each acquired for prospects, and all of them helped bring Henry's ownership group its fourth World Series trophy.

"Look at the job Dave Dombrowski did," said owner John Henry. "Steve Pearce. Nathan, right? Nate Eovaldi came in. And we're set up for next year. Could we be better set up for next year?"

Dombrowski endured his share of criticism for pillaging the farm system. Did he have to trade four players to get Kimbrel? Could he have acquired Eovaldi for something less than promising left-hander Jalen Beeks?

But Dombrowski has always acted aggressively when he targets a player, and much like David Price will never answer another question about his postseason failures, Dombrowski can't reasonably be criticized for choosing present over future. Not when the present involves raising another banner.

Besides which, Dombrowski likes to note that not only is the core of the team young – Betts and Bogaerts just turned 26, Andrew Benintendi is 25, and Devers only 22 – but the farm system is being replenished.

"I know people think we don't have much going in the minors," Dombrowski said. "Our minor league system is getting better, because we've been focused on adding guys and they're going to start to get to Double-A this year. So you're focused on doing both things, and we've got a lot of good young players on this team, too."

With two years remaining on his contract, at the very least Dombrowski will see the Red Sox through the next two seasons, which should once again be championship-caliber. He's looking forward to coming to spring training to oversee an intact champion, which will be a first for him – weeks after his Marlins won it all in 1997, Dombrowski traded veterans Moises Alou, Devon White, Robb Nen, Jeff Conine, and Kevin Brown.

"The one thing I haven't ever done is go into spring training as the world champion with our club," Dombrowski said. This will be the first time I've experienced that. There's something special about not only winning a championship, but being in a position -- and who knows what ends up happening -- where you can defend that title and go to spring training with those same guys. That's a new emotion and feeling for me."

Whatever Dombrowski's feeling at the moment, it's fair to say he earned it.

### **Alex Cora explains stance on White House visit**

Rob Bradford

Immediately after the Red Sox win, John Henry offered his initial thoughts on whether or not his club would be visiting the White House.

Henry's stance?

"I think we will (go to the White House)," the principal owner told WEEI.com.

Speaking to the media Thursday morning, Red Sox manager Alex Cora offered some clarification on where he stood on a potential invitation.

"I've been using this platform the right way the whole time. We'll talk about it as an organization," Cora said. "Whatever we decide is going to be respected. If we decide to go I will use my platform the right way. I mean, if you start looking at this team we've got guys from the United States and from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Puerto Rico. So I'll use the platform the right way. Like I said before, and I know the headlines don't show it, I said I respect the president of the United States and I know he helped our country. So whenever we have to make that decision we'll make it and it's going to be respected."

Cora had been critical of previous tweets from President Donald Trump questioning the casualty toll in Puerto Rico.

The two members of the Astros who didn't attend last year's White House ceremony -- which was held in May -- were Carlos Correa and Carlos Beltran, both natives of Puerto Rico.

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Dave Dombrowski already focused on building 2019 roster**

Sean McAdam

The last time one of Dave Dombrowski's teams won a World Series, he was forced to immediately dismantle it.

Florida Marlins owner Wayne Huizinga ordered Dombrowski to sell off most of the veteran players in a cost-cutting measure designed to make the team more attractive to potential buyers. There was no chance for Dombrowski to build on his success; instead, he soon found himself in the salvage business.

Dombrowski will be under no directive this time. There are no guarantees that the 2019 Red Sox will be an exact replica of the team which won the franchise's ninth title — and fourth in 15 seasons — Sunday night in Los Angeles. Even for a big-market team like the Red Sox, that's almost impossible to achieve, and for that matter, that might not be the wisest course of action.

In 2018, some roster turnover is virtually assured.

But Dombrowski will be given the latitude to pick-and-choose as he sees fit — within reason — when it comes to retaining the current roster.

"I think efforts will be made to keep as many players together as we can, ideally," said Dombrowski. "But I also know baseball rules, finances, make it difficult because sometimes when guys become free agents, they receive offers they can't refuse. But if you told me today we could bring the same club back together totally, we'd be thrilled with that. I don't think it's probably realistic because you see with free agency and what that brings.

"But I would think we'll have a real core of our group of players together and we'll find out and see how many of those guys stay. I don't have any idea at this time. All things being equal, I think they would like to stay here. But again, sometimes there are offers to you that you can't refuse."

The Red Sox had their biggest payroll in franchise history and for 2018, the biggest in the game. The team exceeded every luxury tax threshold this past season, and doing so again in 2019 will result in a steeper task rate. But Dombrowski said he's received no signal from ownership that he needs a reset to get back under any threshold.

"There's been no mention of (being under the luxury tax threshold) for next season," said Dombrowski.

When asked about holes to fill, Dombrowski again noted that it would depend on how the Sox do in retaining their own free agents.

Roughly a half-dozen players — many of them mid-season acquisitions — are eligible for free agency, which is already underway. Closer Craig Kimbrel, reliever Joe Kelly, starter Nathan Eovaldi, second baseman Ian Kinsler and first baseman (and World Series MVP) Steve Pearce head the list of potential free agents.

"I don't think you can define (areas of need) until you know who you're keeping," Dombrowski said. "But if you took the opposite tact and you lost everybody — which I don't anticipate — I would think we would somehow need to address our bullpen because a couple of key guys (Kelly and Kimbrel) are free agents. Our starting pitching, we're pretty good there (with Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Eduardo Rodriguez and Steven Wright under control). But you always have to be cognizant there.

"From a positional player standpoint, I think we're pretty set."

Dombrowski's first order of business will be in determining which free agents will be given qualifying offers. Dombrowski confirmed that the Sox are interested in doing so, but couldn't get more specific because of MLB regulations. Such offers — valued at \$17.9 million this year — must be made by Friday midnight, with players having a week to accept or decline.

Since players traded in the final year of their existing deals — a group that includes Kinsler, Pearce and Eovaldi — are not eligible, that leaves Kimbrel as the most likely recipient of a qualifying offer. Though the Red Sox wish to retain Kelly, too, they would not want to risk that he would accept it, forcing them to pay almost \$18 million for a set-up reliever.

Kimbrel will certainly reject the offer, a process which will allow the Red Sox to continue negotiating with him for a longer term deal while also serving to protect them in the event he signs elsewhere. Under such a scenario, the Red Sox would get a draft pick in compensation.

Once the offer is made Friday, Dombrowski will begin an accelerated offseason that already finds him — if happily so — weeks behind many of his colleagues whose teams either failed to qualify for the postseason or bowed out in earlier rounds.

Dombrowski identified two current members of the roster — Matt Barnes or Ryan Brasier — as potential closing candidates if the team is unable to retain Kimbrel.

“I don’t think we could go into a closer-by-committee approach,” Dombrowski said. “So if it wasn’t Craig, it would be (either Barnes or Brasier) or we’d have to see what other alternatives existed outside the organization.”

Lastly, there’s the matter of some of the organization’s core players (Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr.) who are arbitration-eligible and inching closer toward free agency.

“We’re always open-minded about having conversations with players we want to keep,” Dombrowski said. “It’s not something we’ll start today. But I would think, over the wintertime, there are some guys we’d like to identify that we’d like to try to keep on a long-term basis.”

### **Red Sox Notebook: Rest all that’s needed for Chris Sale; Pedroia’s readiness uncertain**

Sean McAdam

As of now, the Red Sox are confident that Chris Sale doesn’t need any sort of procedure for his ailing shoulder. Sale was diagnosed with mild inflammation in his left shoulder in late July and pitched sparingly over the final two months before pitching in the postseason.

The Red Sox exercised their 2019 option on Sale Tuesday for \$15 million, the first indication that the Sox weren’t overly concerned with his condition going forward.

“We anticipate him coming to spring training and be 100 percent,” said Dave Dombrowski, “at this point, without any surgical procedures. We think just rest will take care of it. That’s really where we are. But we don’t anticipate any kind of surgical procedures whatsoever.”

---

The Sox were happy that David Price elected not to opt-out of his contract and remains under control for the next four seasons at \$127 million.

“I thought that he would (stay) during the season,” Dombrowski said, “and I continued to think that he would after the season because I think he pitched well and his contractual situation is a good one for him and a good one for us. But you never know until they advise you. I didn’t find out officially until (Wednesday). But I’d been talking to David and his agent starting on the flight back from LA through Tuesday and then (Wednesday).”

---

One unknown going forward is the availability of veteran second baseman Dustin Pedroia.

Pedroia underwent major reconstructive surgery on his left knee a year ago, and returned to the Sox in late May. But after appearing in three games, Pedroia went back on the DL, underwent a follow-up arthroscopic procedure last summer and didn’t return to action.

“We have to find exactly what Pedey’s situation is at second base,” said Dombrowski. “I think that’s something that will be a focus for us now. I mean, we’ve talked about it, but how does it continue to progress? We’re hopeful he’ll be ready, but I don’t really know at this time. But with (Eduardo) Nunez and (Brock) Holt with us already, we’ve got Tzu-Wei Lin behind him. We’ve got some depth there. We’ve got

a guy like Michael Chavis that's coming up in the organization, gives us depth depending on where we play him.

"I don't really have that answer yet. There will be time frames. We're just not set exactly when that will be. It will be something we'll focus on over the next time period. I know he's hopeful, we're hopeful but I still have to get a lot more information."

---

Dombrowski was uncertain how the Sox will handle the team's catching situation in 2019. At the start of 2018, Christian Vazquez was the No. 1 receiver, but lost that job to Sandy Leon mid-season. By the time the postseason began, Vazquez was back as the primary catcher. And then there's Blake Swihart.

"We like them all," said Dombrowski. "That's why we haven't made any moves in the past. We like all three of them. I'd say it's unlikely but not impossible that you have three guys (again). They all have their strengths. But I'm not really sure where that's going to take us at this point.

"If you only take two of them, there's only three ways to go and I'm not sure which way we would go. It would just depend on maybe if we had discussions with other clubs, where that would take us. We're not looking to trade anybody per se. But sometimes it can be a position of strength."

---

The team announced a number of roster moves Thursday afternoon.

Pedroia and infielder Marco Hernandez were reinstated from the 60-day DL. Carson Smith was reinstated from the 60-day DL, outrighted from the major league roster and elected free agency.

Tony Renda and Justin Haley, meanwhile, were outrighted from the major league roster.

While most of the moves were procedural, it's interesting to note that Smith was first outrighted off the roster, then chose to be a free agent. Smith threw his glove in frustration in the dugout in May and suffered a torn labrum in his right shoulder, requiring surgery. He later suggested that the injury may have come from overuse, which hardly endeared him to the organization.

It's doubtful that Smith will pitch much — if at all — in 2019 because of the surgery, but whatever the case, he's thrown his last pitch for the Red Sox.

---

Manager Alex Cora will take the World Series trophy to his hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico Saturday to share the championship with friends and family. ... Some Red Sox coaches may be targeted by other organizations. Assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett has been interviewed by both the Texas Rangers and Pittsburgh Pirates for their hitting instructor's position, and there could be others. ... Cora, who was struck by a can of beer thrown at Wednesday's parade, reported that he was fine and absolved the person arrested for the incident, claiming that it wasn't meant as a malicious act. "It's doesn't have to be a big deal, honestly," he said.

## **\* *The Athletic***

### **A step-by-step plan for the Red Sox offseason**

Chad Jennings

Standing on the field at Fenway Park, about to step onto a Duck Boat for his first World Series parade, David Price handled the first bit of Red Sox official business all by himself on Wednesday.

"I'm opting in," he said. "I'm not going anywhere."

Price had until later in the day to decide whether to use the opt-out clause in his contract, but he announced it then and there. Freshly anointed as a postseason hero, he'll be in Boston until 2022, the longest and largest commitment on the payroll.

With that business done, the Red Sox completed their victory lap alongside Boston Common and plunged headlong into their offseason with a clear view of the path ahead. They've picked up their team option on Chris Sale – technically, that was official business conducted before Price's announcement, but it was such a given that it's hard to count it among the team's real decision making – and Eduardo Nunez has exercised his \$5-million player option for 2019, so the team's foundation remains largely in place for next season.

Craig Kimbrel is the Red Sox's most significant pending free agent, Dustin Pedroia is their highest-profile wild card, and Mookie Betts is their most expensive uncertainty as he heads into a second year of arbitration.

For the most part, though, the Red Sox have their most important players returning for at least one more season, and they have meaningful money coming off the books to add some necessary wiggle room.

“Could we be better set up for next year?” owner John Henry asked, and it was clear his question was rhetorical.

Surely, the Red Sox could be better set up, but perhaps not much better. They have a young core in place, an energetic manager who's pushed all the right buttons, and an ownership group that's willing to spend. The offseason is underway. Here's what's on the to-do list for the champs.

#### STEP 1: Free some payroll with free agency

With Sale, Price and Nunez already on board, the Red Sox are left with six pending free agents, half of them mid-season additions.

Craig Kimbrel  
Drew Pomeranz  
Joe Kelly  
Ian Kinsler  
Steve Pearce  
Nathan Eovaldi

That's roughly \$27 million in average annual value coming off the books, plus the Red Sox will rid themselves of Hanley Ramirez's \$22 million (they'll keep paying Pablo Sandoval). Carson Smith and his \$850,000 contract are also off the roster after he was outrighted off the 40-man and into free agency on Thursday.

That's quite a bit of financial relief considering those eight combined for just 4.6 fWAR with the Red Sox last season. But, fair warning, a large portion of that extra money will go toward retaining what's already in place.

#### STEP 2: Set a budget with quite a bit of wiggle room

This season, the Red Sox went over MLB's highest luxury tax threshold of \$237 million, making them baseball's highest-spending team.

While president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski would not give an exact payroll target for next season, he said ownership had not asked him to cut below the lowest luxury tax threshold of \$206 million.

“There has been no mention of doing that for the next season,” he said.

But staying above the highest threshold — which jump to \$246 million next season — remains uncertain. Henry said previously that such a high payroll would not be an annual occurrence.

“We really invested this year and went beyond where we probably should have financially,” Henry said. “...you can’t do it all the time.”

Dombrowski confirmed that the Red Sox will make at least one qualifying offer (one-year, \$17.9 million). That means Kimbrel is almost certainly getting one. Eovaldi might have been a candidate, but he’s ineligible because he was traded mid-season.

Any budget will have to remain flexible given some of the uncertainties on the roster, particularly with the large group awaiting in Step 3.

#### STEP 3: Spend a lot of that payroll through arbitration

This is where the Red Sox’ offseason gets expensive before they add a single player to the roster. The team has a whopping 12 arbitration-eligible players (they did have 13 until Smith was outrighted). Here’s the list, which includes some of the most important players on the team, with 2019 salary estimates from MLB Trade Rumors, which has a strong track record for these projections.

Mookie Betts – \$18.7 million  
Xander Bogaerts – \$11.9 million  
Jackie Bradley Jr. – \$7.9 million  
Eduardo Rodriguez – \$4.8 million  
Brock Holt – \$3.4 million  
Tyler Thornburg – \$2.3 million  
Sandy Leon – \$2.3 million  
Matt Barnes – \$1.5 million  
Brandon Workman – \$1.4 million  
Steven Wright – \$1.4 million  
Heath Hembree – \$1.2 million  
Blake Swihart – \$1.1 million

There are also upcoming raises built into the contracts of Nunez, Sale and Christian Vazquez, so this roster isn’t getting any cheaper, and there’s no obvious non-tender candidate in the mix. Most of the arbitration players are either too important or too cost-effective to let go.

Betts, Bogaerts, Bradley and Rodriguez alone stand to make almost \$17 million more next season than they did this season. That’s the bulk of the money saved from Ramirez’s contract, and that’s before adding anyone. But that’s only the start of the considerations for these guys.

#### STEP 4: Start talking now about contract extensions

Henry said before Wednesday’s parade that he had not yet discussed contract extensions with anyone on the roster. That was fine for the moment, but this winter will be high time for some long-term commitments.

Sale is in his final year of team control, and believe it or not, so is Bogaerts, who’s entering his final round of arbitration eligibility. Betts and Bradley each have only one year of arbitration beyond this one.

It’s time to at least try to lock some of these guys into long-term deals.

“I think ‘sense of urgency’ would be a bit strong,” Dombrowski said. “But we’re always open-minded to having conversations about players we want to keep. It’s not something we’ll start today, but I would think over the wintertime there would be some guys that we would try to identify that we’d like to keep on a long-term basis.”

Betts is obviously the big one. He's not the most pressing — he has two more seasons of team control — but he is a 26-year-old, five-tool MVP candidate who feeds the homeless in his spare time. So, yeah, there's a lot to like about keeping him for the long haul. By going to an arbitration hearing last winter, Betts showed he's willing to fight for his market value. Keeping him will be massively expensive, but there might not be a better financial gamble, and there might not be a better time than the year before he enters his final arbitration cycle.

If not Betts, the Red Sox have more pressing reasons to engage in long-term talks with Sale and Bogaerts. Both are in their final seasons of team control, and both represent hard-to-find commodities (a true ace and a still-young, middle-of-the-order shortstop). Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland, Bradley and Holt will be free agents at the end of next season — Holt, in particular, might be worth a modest two- or three-year deal — but it's Betts, Sale and Bogaerts who loom as the most pressing extension candidates. None will come cheap, but all would solidify this franchise for 2020 and beyond.

Of course, making such commitments is basically a process of prioritization, which will be vital to the Red Sox' next few winters.

STEP 5: Engage the trade market with redundancies in mind

The Red Sox farm system might be improving, but it's not particularly strong at the moment, especially not compared to recent winters when Dombrowski was able to swing trades for Kimbrel, Sale, Pomeranz and Thornburg. Each of their top three Baseball America prospects had disappointing 2018 seasons, which might limit their trade potential.

But, as Dombrowski showed with savvy in-season trades, the Red Sox still have room to maneuver.

Their top three position prospects are all corner infielders — Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec and Triston Casas — who are at least partially blocked by Rafael Devers. Rather than push a guy like Chavis to second base or the outfield — which the Red Sox have considered — it might be more efficient to trade him for a pitcher or a similar-level prospect who can more naturally play up the middle (give up some bat to gain some glove).

The Red Sox also are unusually overloaded at catcher, having carried three on their major league roster all season.

"I'd say it's unlikely but not impossible that you have three guys (again next year)," Dombrowski said.

That means someone will have to go (or else the Red Sox will have to actually use Swihart as a utility man and not simply as a last resort at multiple spots).

Looking for a bigger splash on the trade market brings back a familiar question: What would it take to trade Bradley? That is not a condemnation of Bradley's ability or value. Quite the opposite. He is both talented and valuable, which means he could bring a meaningful return, and the Red Sox have two other viable center fielders plus a DH who can play the outfield corners, which means there's flexibility to make a Bradley trade. Through no fault of his own, Bradley stands out as a potential trade chip if the Red Sox need to do something significant.

If the Red Sox were to go another way in the outfield and trade Benintendi — let's not even consider a trading Betts scenario — it would be a blockbuster of such magnitude this franchise would feel the ripple effects for two decades. It's quite literally difficult to imagine a Benintendi trade. It's just too big. Instead, making a massive change to the roster might require free agency.

STEP 6: Start free agency with Kimbrel, then work from there

Aside from Pomeranz (who clearly could use a fresh start) and Kinsler (the Red Sox already have a mid-30s second baseman) the Red Sox could and should have interest in all of their departing free agents. Eovaldi might price himself out of the mix, and Kelly might find a better late-inning opportunity elsewhere, but Pearce and Kimbrel are particularly good fits for this team.

The Red Sox' free agent efforts basically have to begin with their closer. Committing multiple years to a reliever in his 30s is dangerous business, but the Red Sox really don't have an internal option for the ninth inning, and moving Matt Barnes or Ryan Brasier to the ninth would only open fresh questions in the seventh and eighth.

Wade Davis and Aroldis Chapman have set the market at more than \$17 million a year for an elite, proven closer, and Kimbrel is clearly in that market with the potential for a Hall of Fame career. If anything, he might be more expensive. If Kimbrel negotiation go beyond the Red Sox comfort zone, they'll have to dig into underwhelming alternatives.

"I don't think we go into the closer by committee approach," Dombrowski said. "So, if it wasn't Craig, it'd be either (Barnes or Brasier), or we'd have to see what other alternatives existed outside the organization."

The next free agent tier is Adam Ottavino, Zach Britton, David Robertson, Andrew Miller and Jeurys Familia. Which isn't bad.

Question is, if Kimbrel re-signs, would there be enough payroll left for another huge addition? Maybe another impact reliever or reliable starter? Or would the Red Sox be better off hoping for another bargain like Pearce, who could again platoon at first base and play outfield in a pinch?

One way or another, the Red Sox will need to address depth concerns in the infield and the rotation, because there's at least one point of significant uncertainty at each of those spots.

STEP 7: Keep fingers crossed that two surgically repaired knees continue to heal

While Dombrowski said he does not anticipate anyone needing offseason surgery – even Sale, he said, is expected to recover from his shoulder issues without an operation – the Red Sox are still dealing the effects of two surgeries that happened more than a year ago.

Does the team need an additional second baseman?

"I can't answer that until I find out really what Pedey's situation is," Dombrowski said.

Can they count on Steven Wright to round out the rotation?

"He is a good option," Dombrowski said. "As long as we figure out what's happening with his knee."

Both Pedroia and Wright underwent aggressive surgical procedures to repair damaged cartilage last season. Wright pitched 20 times this season, but he also dealt with multiple setbacks including one in the postseason. Pedroia played just three games and needed a clean-up procedure mid-season.

If Pedroia can play, then the Red Sox have not only their second baseman, but they also their utility infielders in Holt and Nunez. If Wright is durable enough to start, then the Red Sox can slot him behind Sale, Price, Porcello and Rodriguez with Hector Valazquez and Brian Johnson reprising their swing-man roles.

However, if the offseason brings more red flags, the Red Sox might have to prioritize additional depth in the infield and another proven arm for the rotation. If they can bring back Eovaldi for the later role, that would be tremendous, but it's going to depend on Step 2 (their budget) and Step 6 (the open market).

Winning the World Series meant getting a late start on the offseason. The Yankees already have re-signed Brett Gardner, the Cardinals have re-signed Adam Wainwright, and the Nationals have signed reliever Trevor Rosenthal.

The parade is over, the offseason has begun. For the Red Sox, it's time for Step 1.

### **These Red Sox, as people, were particularly easy to root for**

Peter Gammons

If you're a baseball fan whose home base is the Oakland Coliseum or the Tractor Pull Dome in St. Petersburg, or even a great city with a model stadium like Milwaukee and your market size is smaller than Providence — which couldn't keep its Triple-A team — you may look at the Red Sox and their four world championships in 15 years and this October's march through teams in the first, second and fifth largest markets in baseball and think, hey, Boston had the highest payroll in baseball.

And think that for all Fenway Park does to bring one home to our great-grandparents' time, in 2018 they generated close to \$700 million in revenues and think: Mercenary Territory.

This team won 119 games and went 7-1 in the home parks of the Yankees, Astros and Dodgers. Their playoff nights turned into your mornings. And after every one of those wins, they seemingly chanted "Fool that I am, I'd do it all over again." And then they did.

There are deep roots, of drafting Mookie Betts in the fifth round seven years ago, trading a bunch of top prospects for Chris Sale, signing J.D. Martinez as a free agent. They also have a scouting department that drafted the best outfielder in the sport, signed an All-Star shortstop and two young catchers and stockpiled enough prospects to acquire Craig Kimbrel, Rick Porcello, Nathan Eovaldi, Steve Pearce et al., too.

This season was much about the steeped New England past. But when the 2017 playoffs ended, in the eyes of ownership and management and the players and the fanbase, the 2004-2013 run seemed at a critical roundabout, with one exit sign reading "All In," another "The Window Starts Closing in 2020" and "Consecutive Division Titles are a Competitive Entertainment Product."

Privately, some on the team expressed concerns that for all their extraordinary young players, there was a stagnancy underlying them. They didn't blame John Farrell; they appreciated that there was a disconnect between Farrell, who was from the Terry Francona administration, and Dave Dombrowski, who was brought in by John Henry to win before the window inevitably would close.

Back before the Red Sox had ended the Curse of the Bambino, I remember Dodgers players one spring training opining that Alex Cora was the smartest player in the game. In his time in Boston, he was part of a core of role players who turned out to be invaluable to a 2007 World Series team that had the best postseason run differential of any team in the wild-card era; the way that Cora and Mike Lowell got Manny Ramirez to join them at the gym every morning of that October was one behind-the-scenes factor in Manny's Last Dance for that team.

Cora didn't care about making Joe Maddon money. He wanted to manage, and he wanted to manage in a market where, as Mike Barnicle once wrote, "baseball is not a life and death matter, the Red Sox are." Those of us who had covered him knew his intelligence, the baseball blood that ran through his veins from his father Joseph Manuel to brother Joey, and the cross-cultural people instincts that set him apart. Between 2012 and 2017, he'd managed in winter ball, where three straight losses could cost you a job, and he'd run the Puerto Rican team in the World Baseball Classic.

He wanted to help his homeland. And he wanted power, not money — a voice on the roster, control of an analytics system he would expand, and a coaching staff with a veteran bench coach (Ron Roenicke managed him in the Dodger system) and smart workaholics to whom he could delegate authority like a CEO. And got it.

As soon as he got the job, and Red Sox ownership immediately fulfilled their obligation to aid his hurricane-ravaged island, he began flying from player to player for an off-season check-in, a practice so effectively employed in the past by Pat Gillick and Mark Shapiro. He told Mookie Betts this was his time, that he and Andrew Benintendi would be 1-2 for the season. He let Jackie Bradley Jr. know he was the center fielder. He met with pitchers and promised clarity; he was still sending out texts in the middle of the night to every player about his role in the next game right up to October 28.

“There was no question about his establishing mutual trust,” Betts said this summer. Cora had played for a lot of managers and understood that, in that position, the trust you make is equal to the trust you take.

“I know we’re expected to win,” Cora said in April. “That’s good. This team is really good.”

Expected to win, Cora backed off his starting pitchers. In October, when it came time to turn it on, starting pitchers made seven appearances out of the bullpen. “He was never intimidated by the job, the city or the expectations,” says one veteran pitcher. “As a player, you sense that.”

In my mind, it all fell into place on the morning of June 2. A few days before, the Red Sox had announced they had released Hanley Ramirez. I sat in Cora’s office at 9 a.m. before a Saturday day game. He said, “This isn’t about Hanley, it’s about Mitch Moreland. He needs to play. He is a leader; you know that (from his days playing for Bourne in the Cape League when people around the team regarded him as the finest person to play there in a decade).” His understanding of the 25-man roster and roles and the tapestry woven between stars and role players, old and young, \$30M pitchers and some guy named Brasier who in 2017 was pitching in Japan, was what ideal championship teams are about.

So “Brock Star” Holt became part of the team epicenter, even before he finally had recovered from two and a half years of concussion issues, and had a 1.200 OPS in September. That allowed Christian Vazquez and Sandy León to accept their catching split, and Blake Swihart his development; in Games 1 and 4 of the ALDS, León and Vazquez each blocked seven pitches with runners in scoring position in late innings and were keys in moving on to the defending world champion Astros.

The day Alex Cora made it “all about Mitch Moreland” seemed like the last cleansing of the “25 Guys, 25 Cabs” era of Red Sox history, when regular players were allowed to take private jets home from the West Coast while the minions arrived at Logan Airport at 5 a.m.

Cora, Dombrowski and ownership collaborated on the right guys.

Mookie Betts was always one of the nicest people one could ever meet. He never stopped working, taking infield every day, power-shagging in the outfield, spending hours with J.D. Martinez and hitting coach Tim Hyers — a huge off-season signing — on hitting.

Arizona general manager Mike Hazen, who traded for Martinez in 2017 but did not have the payroll to resign him, said, “J.D. changed our franchise’s culture. He’s a hitting PhD.” Hazen was right. His work ethic, his video studies, his perfection, his hours in the cage rubbed off on everyone. He and Betts had video coordinator Billy Broadbent record every batting practice swing, and they would watch them before games to, as Martinez put it, “see how our swings were that day and if adjustments were necessary.”

When Martinez was a rookie with the Astros he asked a highly paid veteran for some help. The veteran blew him off. Martinez wasn’t bitter, but he never forgot that experience. It wouldn’t matter if it was a star or a minor league catcher called up in an emergency — if requested, Martinez and Betts would go to the cage and help him. They helped Bradley. They took Rafael Devers in for cage work and tutelage. “You’d never know J.D. is making big money,” says one of the coaches. “Actually, it’s true of everyone here. Price, Sale, Porcello... they work as hard as any kid trying to make the big leagues.”

Price and Porcello have been called “the ultimate pitcher teammates” by Brad Ausmus, who has caught the seventh-most games in the history of baseball. Price mentors, coaches and shapes up Eduardo Rodríguez.

Porcello is like the class president, the intelligent, rational workaholic who understands how to help players deal with the high blood pressure of the Red Sox fans.

When a 5-0 lead became a potential sinkhole in the first game of the Yankee series, when the bullpen gate opened before the top of the eighth inning and out walked Porcello — who was supposed to start two days later — four different players described their feelings with the word “trust.”

An image that will never be forgotten was Price raking the bullpen mound. Sometime early each afternoon during the entire postseason, he intensely threw on flat ground. He relieved one night, warmed up the next, won the World Series the next. He became the first Red Sox pitcher to win three consecutive postseason starts since Luis Tiant against the A’s and Reds in 1975. When he left the clincher in Los Angeles, it looked like every teammate he’d had from Tampa to Detroit to Toronto to Boston embraced him.

Porcello was also out virtually every day, throwing, working, preparing for any role. And when Eovaldi followed two straight relief appearances against the Dodgers with his 90-pitch, seven-inning stint in the 18-inning game, Porcello began praising Eovaldi and had tears welling in his eyes. Holt called Eovaldi’s outing “one of the greatest things I’ve ever seen in baseball.”

It was the only game the Red Sox lost on the road in the postseason, and from what might have been a heartbreaking loss, they emerged with a positive.

Every day, pitchers worked with Dana Levangie and Brian Bannister, honing their approaches. Joe Kelly emerged as a star not because he threw 100 mph, but because he commanded a curveball that has the fourth best spin rate in the game, according to Statcast. Kelly threw 11 1/3 innings in the postseason, most of all relievers, to an 0.71 ERA. Porcello had the 16th best curveball spin rate. Matt Barnes throws 98, but in one outing he threw 15 pitches — 14 curveballs.

But, most of all, it was Porcello, Price, Sale and Eovaldi coming out of the pen for 25 innings and two earned runs. In the end, Boston’s bullpen entered the postseason considered the weakest among the Yankees’, Astros’ and Dodgers’ elite. They finished October with the best earned run average, 2.71, and recorded five outs fewer than the Dodgers, whose bullpen led all teams with 64 2/3 innings out of the pen.

It will be a long time before any New Englander forgets Bradley’s ALCS MVP homers, or Pearce’s World Series homers and MVP.

But what I will remember is the early morning hours following the Red Sox win against the Dodgers when Betts and a friend gathered up containers of extra food and distributed it to homeless people on the sidewalk outside the Boston Public Library in Copley Square.

“I never intended for it to go public,” Betts said, apologetically. “We weren’t going to eat the food. Others needed it.”

Mookie will likely be voted the MVP. Here are the wOBA (his production) and xwOBA (what his contact should have produced) stats from Statcast from the 1-2 leaders in both:

Betts: .449/.429

Mike Trout: .447/.426.

That’s what the two best players in baseball are, scientifically.

That’s who Mookie is, humanely.

Some of us love baseball, be it in Caguas, Puerto Rico, or Boston, Dodger Stadium or the cage beneath the Red Sox dugout at Fenway. At the end of my 50th year covering baseball I root not for teams, but for the people who play the game at a level that we, as kids, could never imagine.